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THE NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS TO OUR BLESSED LADY

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THE NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS TO ST. PETER

THOUGHTS TWICE-DYED

THE NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS TO OUR BLESSED LADY

By
FR. VINCENT McNABB, O.P.

LONDON
SHEED & WARD
1930

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TO MY SISTERS

MARY (R.I.P.), MARGARET (R.I.P.), GEORGINA, ANNE (SISTER MARY VINCENT, O.P.) WHOSE LOVE, WELCOMING ME AT BIRTH AND NEVER FAILING ME IN LIFE, HAS TAUGHT ME TO KNOW AND TO PRIZE THE LOVE OF

OUR BLESSED LADY

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PREFACE

For some five and twenty years the writer of this little book has harboured the wish to do what he has now done.

Amongst the many cherished memories of his Catholic home, over which God reigned as God, one of the most cherished and unforgettable is that of the mother and her many children, with beads in hand, gathered, it might be, round the kitchen table, praying to the Father and Mother in heaven for the earthly father who was out upon the sea. In such a Catholic home the gracious Lady whom the Faith calls "Mother of God" and the faithful call "Mother" was given, as good parents are always given in such homes, an unconscious love that startles later years by its mastery over the mind.

Some threescore years of life in the quiet cloister or on the noisy battle-front have neither dulled these memories nor lessened to the writer's heart the sweetness of the title a Catholic home was wont to give God's Mother. She was "Our Blessed Lady"! Even to-night as I write these words of childhood on the white page they have

such resistless power to bring childhood back again across a long lifetime that they match and even rhyme with "home." Let my readers take my word as true, if only to understand how some five and twenty years' resolve to give what the writer now gives to his Blessed Lady has been a Silver Jubilee in his soul.

Such glorious things have been said of this Mother of men by loving and gifted children that there were days in this Jubilee of years when the writer's resolve died down to the echo of an echo. If at last he has taken heart, it is not as if any word of his could give him fellowship with the glorious Captains of Our Lady's praise. But remembering how soon he must enter upon the great romance of his second and better childhood he dares to offer to his Mother in heaven these few field flowers that are of value only because they are the love-gatherings of a child.

VINCENT MCNABB, O.P.

10th October, 1928.

INTRODUCTION

We may here lay down a principle of theological commentation which we shall feel obliged to use again and again in our exposition of the Marian texts. This principle is formulated thus by St Thomas:

> "When a man knows that he is being moved by the Holy Ghost to think something or to signify something by word or deed, this belongs properly to prophecy; whereas when he is moved without his knowing it, this is not perfect prophecy, but a prophetic instinct. Nevertheless, it must be observed that since the prophet's mind is a defective instrument even true prophets know not all that the Holy Ghost means by the things they see or speak or even do" (*Sum. Theol.*, II-II, *q.* 173, *a.* 4.).

This principle, so accurately formulated by the Church's theologian, will allow the Church of God, guided by the Holy Ghost, to see more in the words of an inspired person than was seen

by that person under the light of inspiration. Critics to whom the literal sense of such inspired words is rightly of first importance have shown such an untiring, humble scholarship as to lay upon theologians a debt of gratitude impossible to repay; or only possible when theologians seem to contradict, by transcending, the literal sense determined by the literary expert. There is then a least, literal, sense which it is the duty of the literary critic to determine and, perhaps, not to transcend. Yet there is a highest, ultra-literal, sense which it is the duty of the theologian to discover and defend. And whereas the literary critic will admit that the text of an inspired saying must at least mean the least, the theologian will add that it may mean the most. For example; when the angel addresses Our Blessed Lady: "Hail, full of grace", it must mean at least "Hail, highly favoured". Yet it may mean "Hail, full of grace that hath sanctified thee from the moment of thy begetting". Again, when Elizabeth cried out: "Whence is this to me that the mother of My Lord should come to me?", it must mean at least "the mother of the expected Messias". Yet, as that Messias is "God of God", it may mean "the Mother of God".

* * * *

We think it well to reprint what we have

already published in our recent book, *The New Testament Witness to St. Peter:*

We need hardly say that we fully accept, as we should accept, the ruling of the Biblical Commission:

"Is it lawful to desert the view which, based on the testimony of the most ancient and most consistent of traditions, holds that after Matthew, who first of them all committed his Gospel to writing in his mother-tongue, Mark wrote second, Luke third?

"Is it contrary to this view to maintain that the second and third gospels were written before the Greek versions of the first gospel were made?

"Reply in the NEGATIVE to both questions" (June 26th, 1921).

* * * *

We therefore make our own once and for all the following words of Lagrange:

"Nous ne pouvions nous dérober a l'examen du rapport entre Matthieu et Marc . . Nous avons constaté, avec des ressemblances évidentes, depuis longtemps signalées, des différences qu'on semble laisser dans l'ombre assez volontiers. . . Ce double phénomène nous a paru exiger une solution mixte: *indépendance* d'un texte primitif araméen de

l'apôtre Matthieu—*dépendance* du traducteur Grec par rapport à Marc" (*S. Matthieu*, p. 11).

"A l'égard du Mt. araméen . . . Matthieu ayant écrit pour les Juifs chrétiens dans leur langue, il n'est pas impossible de concevoir que Marc ait cru devoir écrire les mêmes choses pour les greco-romains en grec. . . Nous maintenons donc qu'il s'en est tenu à la catéchèse de Pierre à Rome. . .

"Au surplus la dépendance du Mt. grec étant admise, ill ne reste plus qu'a expliquer comment il se fait que Mc. et Mt. contiennent les mêmes morceaux. . .

"Rien n'empêche d'attribuer cet accord à la situation de la catéchèse à Jérusalem. Avant de prêcher à Rome, Pierre a enseigné à Jérusalem, il est peu probable qu'il ait ensuite changé sa manière. . . Pierre à Rome se contentait sans doute de ce qu'on avait dit et écrit à Jérusalem" (ibid, p. xli).*

* Quoted in *The New Testament Witness to St Peter*, pp. 23, 24.

We need hardly add that to an upholder of the Petrine Supremacy the scholarly decision of the Biblical Commission, far from creating difficulties, multiplies proof. In the above-mentioned book, the present writer has suggested that the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John are undeniably Petrine or Roman documents. The evidence for this is strengthened by the fact that the first (Hebrew) edition of the first gospel—written by an apostle—was translated into Greek under the influence of a gospel which was written by one who was not an apostle.

But this writer, St Mark, who was not an apostle, had given to his gospel one quality which made it authoritative even with an apostle: it was an authentic record of the (Roman) teaching of St Peter.

If, as seems likely, the Greek translation of St Matthew's Hebrew gospel was undertaken during the lifetime of St Matthew, the proof for the authority of St Peter is greatly strengthened.

THE NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS TO OUR BLESSED LADY

CHAPTER I

THE WITNESS OF ST MATTHEW

St Matthew's witness to our Blessed Lady's dignity stands to St Mark's witness almost as the explicit stands to the implicit. Nowhere in St Mark's gospel is the Virgin Birth denied; but everywhere is it implicit.

A preliminary principle may here be stated once for all. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth, like the doctrine of the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord, created so many difficulties that the only reason for preaching it was its truth! If Christ's body had not risen from the tomb, to preach the Resurrection would have been to bring Christianity into contempt. In the same way, but with almost greater certainty, the teaching of the Virgin Birth, if it were not true, would have been the death of Christianity. We can hardly see any human motive actuating the first great Christian leaders to teach this doctrine except that they thought it was true. Everywhere

the teaching of the Virgin Birth would raise difficulties. To the Greeks it would merely suggest the amours of polytheism. To the Jews it would seem almost a denial of their historic past. Even nowadays the Jew is set against Christianity more by the doctrine of the Virgin Birth than by any other Christian doctrine.

If, then, St Matthew's gospel opens with a very detailed assertion and indeed proof of the Virgin Birth, this is all the more significant if we consider to whom St. Matthew addressed his gospel. It is agreed among biblical critics that St Matthew intended his gospel for the Jew as distinct from the Gentiles. Yet, although there was the mysterious prophecy, "Behold a Virgin will conceive" (הִנֵּה הָעַלְמָה הָרָה), *Is.* vii, 14, it was time and not tradition that made the prophecy clear. Jewish maidens who thought they might be privileged to be the mother of the Messias did not dream of parthenogenesis. In the event, when Gabriel bore tidings of the Incarnation to the Virgin at Nazareth, he heard from her lips the question which every Jewish maiden would have put, "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" (*Luke.* i, 34.) We have dwelt on this point before beginning our examination of St Matthew's witness to the Blessed Virgin Mary because that witness, so

opposed to the Jews for whom he wrote, could have had no motive but the truth.

(*a*) The special witness of St Matthew is contained in the first two chapters of his gospel. These two chapters begin with a table of ancestry, showing how Jesus is legally the Son of David, and of Abraham.

The opening words are significant. "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." It may well be thought that St Matthew, who had been a tax-collector at Capharnaum, was here incorporating an official genealogy which would be in the Roman imperial offices in Galilee. The Roman civil service was so efficient in its methods that, as St Luke pointed out, Joseph was ordered by the government to enrol at Bethlehem "because he was of the house and family of David" (*Lk.* ii, 4).

This book, or official roll, of the generation of Jesus would naturally end with the words, "And Mathan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph. And Joseph begot Jesus." It is significant that St Matthew ends thus: "And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ."

In this list, mention of women was made thrice: "And Salmon begot Booz of Rahab. And Booz begot Obed of Ruth. . . And David the king begot Solomon of her that had been the

wife of Urias." St Matthew had thus clear guidance if he wished to name both the human father and mother of Jesus. His departure from this clear guidance is of the utmost significance. The writer who ignored the official fatherhood of Joseph and set aside his own manner of recalling motherhood in order to show that Jesus had no human father but only a human mother, was determined that his writing should leave the Virgin Birth beyond cavil.

(*b*) The two chapters of *Matthew* which follow this introductory genealogy are of unique structure and significance. To realise this significance we must forget Stephen Langton's division of them into two chapters. This artificial and indeed arithmetical division almost disguises the fact that the two chapters are as strophic as any of the poetic fragments of the Old Testament. Thus both the Old Testament and the New open with what is nothing less than a Hebrew poem of days and dreams—of days that are not just days, of dreams that are not just day-dreams. Indeed, if we take St Augustine as our guide for the opening poem of *Genesis*, the two books of the divine revelation open with God-sent dreams, either to angels, about the world's creation, or to a saint, about the world's redemption.

(*c*) It is becoming increasingly credited that we owe these two opening chapters of St

Matthew's gospel to the Galilean carpenter whose dreams are here given with the inimitable simplicity of Hebrew verse. These two chapters of *Matthew* may well be the official witness of the just man who, being the husband of Mary, could alone give the official witness of the Virgin Birth. It is not reason, still less is it history, that would make it impossible for these chapters to be a word-for-word statement of Joseph, son of Jacob. In this matter of St Joseph destructive criticism has afforded strange sights. When arguing against the Virgin Birth, St Joseph has been taken as a reality; when arguing against the possibility of his witness, he has been taken to be a fiction. How irrational it is, on the one hand to make Joseph so real as to be the father of Jesus, and on the other hand to make him so legendary that he could not make an official denial that he was the father of Jesus!

(*d*) If it is clearly possible that St Joseph may have written these chapters, and (if the Virgin Birth is true) not only possible but likely, this possibility and likelihood are strengthened by internal criticism of the chapters. Nothing in these two chapters of the Judæo-Roman customs official is beyond the common speech of a Galilean carpenter. But we strongly suspect that it is beyond the common speech of the Judæo-

Roman customs official. In all the subsequent narrative parts of his gospel, St Matthew nowhere uses this Hebrew poetic setting for his narrative. The fragment is unique, recalling the tales of the hearth and camp that are the riches of the Hebrew literature.*

(*e*) But whether the first two chapters of the first gospel are St Joseph's explicit witness to the Virgin Birth, or not, they are undeniably explicit witness to the Virgin Birth. Whoever was their writer, whether a first-hand or a second-hand witness, he was minded to point out the dignity of the virgin wife of Joseph and mother of Jesus. Mary, wife of Joseph, is mother of a child who was not Joseph's child. Her son is God's Son. She is, in the pages of St. Matthew's gospel, what the Christian Church foregathered at Ephesus proclaimed her to be. Mary is the Mother of God: *θεοτόκος*.

(*f*) If anything could add to the weight of the witness of St Matthew, if not of St Joseph, it is the essentially Hebrew and indeed Oriental character of the witnessing chapters. Hebrew

*One minor confirmation of this view may be worth noting: "And entering the house, they [the wise men] found the child, with Mary his mother" (*Mt.* ii, 11). Compare with *Lk.* ii, 16: "And they [the shepherds] found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger." If Joseph is responsible for the passage in *Matthew*, he is responsible for leaving his own name out; but St Luke, under similar circumstances, has put St Joseph's name in.

and Oriental custom gave little prominence to women. True to this custom, and perhaps with a view to recommending the whole gospel to Hebrew and Oriental thought, the writer of the chapters gives no place of prominence to Mary, wife of Joseph. It is to Joseph and not, of course, to his wife that the coming birth of Jesus is announced by an angel's visit. It is to Joseph and not to the mother of Jesus that God's ways with the child are revealed. It is Joseph and not the woman who is the visible head. All this is in the full tide of Hebrew custom and law. But if it shows the writer to be a law-abiding Jew for whom the husband is the head, it raises to its highest his witness to Mary as the θεοτόκος.

CHAPTER II

THE WITNESS OF ST MARK

St Mark's gospel is so commonly felt to be a difficulty rather than a help to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth that it is worth while studying its witness.

(*a*) The first difficulty usually urged against the doctrine is that *Mark* lacks the Matthæan Birth-document. But this is to use the argument from silence, which may or may not be valid. To say that a man knows nothing because he says nothing is a fault against sound logic, and even against good taste. The argument from silence to ignorance is more than hazardous; it is unjustifiable.

But (i) the gospel represents the mind of St Peter. Antecedent probabilities are irrefutably for supposing that the apostle who made the most public profession of faith in the Divine Sonship did accept the Virgin Birth (*Matt.* xvi, 16).

Still (ii) no great weight could be set upon the silence of the Petrine gospel, were it indeed

silent. For the Marcan gospel is the preaching of Peter. It is essentially an εὐαγγέλιον, *i.e.*, a message, a witness, an eye- and ear-witness. St Mark alone calls his work an εὐαγγέλιον. Neither St Luke nor St John ever uses the word. And the first gospel, which does use the word four times, is entitled *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ*. St Mark's gospel is essentially the "witness" of St Peter. It is his formal evidence. It is what he saw, and heard, and preached. There is scarcely a word or an incident in the gospel that St Peter had not personally heard or seen. He could, therefore, appeal to it as evidence. It was of apologetic value.

Hence he begins with the preaching of the Baptist, whom he had heard and seen. But he had been nowise a witness of the Virgin Birth, nor was it of any apologetic value; to preach it was to increase rather than lessen the difficulties of faith. It was otherwise with the Resurrection. Of that great miracle he had been in a special way the witness; moreover, it was of some apologetic worth. Thus it formed the master theme of the apostolic preaching. On antecedent grounds, then, no argument could be drawn from the supposed silence of St Mark.

(*b*) But St Mark's witness to the Virgin Birth is by no means to be overlooked. If it is not the thesis of the Gospel, it is not denied by the

thesis. The argument naturally falls into subdivisions.

(i) Not once does St Mark call Jesus the son of Joseph. In *Mk.* vi, 3, He is called ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας (*Mt.* xiii, 55, ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ λέγεται Μαρίαμ), where St Luke has (iv, 23) οὐχὶ υἱός ἐστιν Ἰωσὴφ οὗτος; and St John (vi, 42) Ἰησοῦς ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ.

Again, *Mk.* iii, 35: "Whosoever shall do the will of God, he is my brother and my sister and my mother" (but there is no mention of father).

This is somewhat more striking if we recall that St Mark has a fondness for giving the parentage of those who appear prominently in his gospel. He alone gives (*Mk.* x, 46) "the son of Timaeus". Indeed, "father" is a characteristic word of St Mark. He alone gives (*Mk.* vii, 10) "Honour thy *father* and thy mother; and he that shall curse *father* or mother, dying let him die."

(ii) If St Mark nowhere calls Jesus Christ the son of Joseph, he insists on the fact that Jesus Christ is the "Son of God". Indeed, it is doubtful whether this should not be looked upon as the thesis of his gospel. And indeed it might well be, if St Peter's profession of faith is kept in mind. The references to the Son of God are very striking:

Mk. i, 1: ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

υἱοῦ θεοῦ. B and D support this reading; ℵ omits it.

Mk. i, 11: "Thou art My beloved Son." (This is the first mention of the parentage of Jesus Christ. It should be compared with St Peter's profession of faith, especially with *Matt.* xvi, 17, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father." Moreover, St Mark displaces the chronology in order to begin with this striking saying.)

Mk. iii, 11: "And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God."

Mk. v, 7: The unclean spirit "cried out with a loud voice, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, the Son of the most high God?"

Mk. ix, : "And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, THIS IS MY MOST BELOVED SON, HEAR HIM." (It should be compared with *II Peter*, i, 17: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." 18: "And this voice we heard brought from heaven when we were with him on the holy mount.") *Cf. inf.*, *Mk.* viii, 38.

Mk. xiv, 61: "Art Thou the Christ, *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ*, the Son of the blessed God?"

Mk. xv, 39: "The centurion . . . said . . . Truly this man was the Son of God."

(iii) Confirmatory evidence may be found in the parable of the master of the vineyard, which

is found in the Synoptists. *Mk.* xii, 6: "Having yet therefore ONE Son, His well-beloved" (ἔτι ἕνα εἶχεν υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν). St Mark alone gives ἕνα, one.

All three Synoptists agree that it was this parable that goaded the chief priests and the Pharisees to seek to lay hands on Him.

Another confirmation is from *Mk.* xiii, 32: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels which are in heaven; neither the *Son*, but the Father." The gradation is especially noteworthy—man, angels, THE SON, the Father.

Lastly, *Mark* never mentions the name of St Joseph, although it is mentioned by *Matthew*, *Luke* and *John*.

(iv) There are fourteen texts in which Jesus Christ is called the *Son of Man*.

The accompaniments of this title are a strong confirmation of the thesis.

Mk. ii, 10: "The *Son of Man* hath power on earth to forgive sin" (a privilege hitherto reserved to God alone). He is THE Son of Man because he is THE Son of God.

Mk. ii, 28: "The *Son of Man* is Lord of the Sabbath" (i.e., almost the most sacred title of Jehovah).

Mk. viii, 31: "The *Son of Man* must suffer . . . and be killed . . . and rise again."

Mk. viii, 38: "The *Son of Man*. . . when he shall come in the glory of his Father." (*Cf. Mk.* xiii, 26, 27: "They shall see the *Son of Man* coming in the clouds with great power and glory . . . And then he shall send his angels.")

Mk. ix, 8: " . . . till the *Son of Man* shall be risen again from the dead." (The voice from the cloud had just said "THIS IS MY BELOVED SON.")

Mk. ix, 11: "It is written of the *Son of Man* that he must suffer."

Mk. ix, 30: "The *Son of Man* shall be betrayed . . . they shall kill him . . . and he shall rise again."

Mk. x, 33, 34: "The *Son of Man* shall be betrayed . . . they shall . . . kill him; and the third day he shall rise again."

Mk. x, 45: "The *Son of Man* is not come to be ministered unto, but . . . to give his life a redemption for many."

Mk. xiii, 26: *cf. supr., Mk.* viii, 38.

Mk. xiv, 21: "Woe to that man by whom the *Son of Man* shall be betrayed."

Mk. xiv, 41: "The *Son of Man* shall be betrayed."

Mk. xiv, 61, 62: "The high priest asked him, and said to him, Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the blessed God? and Jesus said to him: I am. And you shall see the *Son of Man* sitting on the hand of the power of God, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

(v) There are four texts in which He is called the Son of David (*Mk.* x, 47, 48; xii, 35, 37).

(*c*) St Peter, from whom the Gospel of St Mark draws its information, either believed that Jesus Christ was the son of Joseph or did not believe. If he believed, it is almost inconceivable that he should never call Him by His father's name, especially when it was the custom of the country to do so. It becomes still more inconceivable when we remark that he uses the phrase "Son of God" seven times, "Son of Man" fourteen times, and "Son of David" four times.

On the other hand, if he held that Jesus Christ was not the son of Joseph, but the Son of God, although the son of Mary, the whole of his witness becomes clear and self-consistent.

* * * *

It is perhaps not without significance that it is to Alexandria, the See of St Mark, that we owe the two fundamental doctrines of the ὁμοούσιος and θεοτόκος.

CHAPTER III

THE WITNESS OF ST LUKE

ST LUKE'S GOSPEL

THERE is a state of mind which is greatly moved by the absence of certain doctrines from all or some books of the New Testament. Thus, to one who finds no explicit mention of Mary the mother of Jesus in any of the Epistles of St Paul, the Catholic devotion to Mary the mother of Jesus, that devotion which is common to West and East, seems almost sacrilegious.

This perplexed state of mind is met by a general and a particular argument. The general argument is taken from the fragmentary and—if we may so call it—casual nature of the contents of the New Testament. The particular argument is based on showing that the writer whose epistles seem to ignore the unique dignity of Our Blessed Lady has elsewhere shown that in this doctrine, as in all other doctrines, he is in line with the Catholic tradition of East and West.

This particular argument is of avail for those who find with bewilderment that not one word

about the office and dignity of the mother of Jesus is to be found in the two weighty *Epistles* of Peter. Their bewilderment should be at an end when they realise that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth and therefore of the divine maternity of Mary is wrought into the gospel of St Mark, which is in substance the authentic teaching of St Peter.

Still greater bewilderment of mind is likely to be caused by the entire absence of direct mention of the Virgin Mother of Jesus in the epistles of St Paul.* If we include in the epistles of St Paul the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, which even by all non-Catholic exegetes is admitted to be Pauline in its doctrine if not in its style, we shall find the absence of our Blessed Lady from these fourteen epistles to be something of a mystery. St Paul's writings not only rival in bulk the four gospels, but they far exceed in bulk the rest of the New Testament. They are written to almost every class and grouping of the early Church. Moreover, as in bulk they can compare with the gospels, so too, their publication on the one side probably preceded the earliest gospel and on the other side almost synchronized with the latest synoptic gospel. Lastly, these lengthy, wide-aimed epistles, extending over a long period of

*We recall *Gal.* iv, 4 "God sent his Son made of a woman" (γυναικός).

years, extend also over such a wide range of doctrine, and treat that doctrine with such fullness of exposition, that some modern critics have looked upon Paul of Tarsus and not Jesus of Nazareth as the effective maker of the Faith, if not of the Church. Yet from all that mass of closely-reasoned doctrine for "Gentile and Jew, barbarian and Scythian, bond and free" we cannot extract one direct mention of Mary, the Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ!

We have pointed out that to such a difficulty as this absence of all mention of our Lady in the epistles of St Paul there are two answers—the general and the particular. For the more scholarly minds the general answer may be sufficient. Such minds realise that though St Paul wrote on many subjects, yet he could not write on all, even if he had wished, as assuredly he did not wish, to give the early Church a "Catechism of Christian Doctrine."

Yet happily not only scholarship but simple faith is ministered to in the New Testament. The general answer to the difficulty is accompanied and strengthened by the particular answer. Thus we have seen that the difficulty raised by the absence of all allusion to the Mother of God in the two *Epistles* of St Peter is met by the very full acceptance of the Virgin Birth, and therefore of the divine maternity, in

the Gospel of St Mark, which is Petrine in doctrine and perhaps in word. So likewise the difficulty of St Paul's fourteen epistles is met by the *Gospel* and the *Acts* of St Luke, which are in substance the teaching of St Paul. Too much stress can hardly be laid on the obvious fact that St Luke, the companion and, as we should say, the secretary of St Paul, would not publish works of such primary importance as the *Gospel* and the *Acts* without consulting his master St Paul. We may be excused for further labouring a plain truth now accepted by sound biblical criticism. This truth may be formulated by saying that St Luke's *Gospel* and *Acts of the Apostles* are no less Pauline in doctrine than the *Epistles to the Hebrews*.

(*a*) The chief witness of *Luke*, like the chief witness of *Matthew* is contained in the first two chapters.

We confess that we know no *a priori* arguments against the possibility that St Joseph was responsible for the first two chapters of *Matthew* and that Mary, the wife of Joseph, was responsible for the first two chapters of *Luke*.

Moreover, on any theory of the person of Jesus Christ this view of the opening chapters of *Luke* would seem not merely possible but even probable. Only two theories can be broached; either that Jesus Christ was born of a Virgin, or

that Jesus Christ was not born of a Virgin. But in neither case could the (true or false) doctrine of the Virgin Birth arise contemporaneously without the active co-operation of the alleged virgin mother. Those who deny that Mary, though mother, was a virgin mother would see how likely it is that the whole story of a miraculous conception would naturally come from the imposter herself. On the other hand, those of us who hold the doctrine of the Virgin Birth must see that the story of the miraculous conception must come from the mother and from her alone. Thus both defenders and opponents of the Virgin Birth will agree that it is not only possibly but probably the account of no other than the Mother of Jesus which we possess in the opening chapters of St Luke's gospel.

(*b*) Confirmation of this view is to be found in the Hebrew character of these two chapters. St Luke's gospel, directed as it was by St Paul, the Doctor of the Gentiles, was meant not for a Jewish but for a Gentile audience. We may, therefore, describe the opening chapters as a Jewish or Hebrew prologue to a Greek Gospel.

(*c*) We called attention, p. 22 note, to the fact that the text describing the coming of the Magi reads "Entering into the house they found the child with Mary his mother" (*Mt.* ii, 11). There is no mention of Joseph. But the text describing

the coming of the shepherds reads "They found Mary and Joseph and the infant" (*Lk.* ii, 16). St Joseph is not only mentioned, but mentioned in the place of honour next to the child Jesus.

Moreover, we have the phrase "his parents". Thus "When *his parents* brought in the child Jesus" (*Lk* ii, 27). Again, "*His parents* went every year to Jerusalem" (*Lk.* ii, 41). Again, "The child Jesus remained in Jerusalem. And *his parents* knew it not" (*Lk.* ii, 43). This phrase is made the stronger by the account of the finding in the Temple, in which our Lady says to her child Jesus "Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing" (*Lk.* ii, 48). This is the strongest argument against the Virgin Birth to be found in the four gospels. But it is the exaltation of the dignity of Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus. Coming as it does in the second chapter of St Luke's gospel, it serves to confirm our view that these chapters are due to the pen or dictation of the Virgin wife who recognised in her husband the God-appointed head or πατὴρ or "father" of the Holy Family.*

**Lk.* ii, 48 "Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." We believe that no literary artist, but only a mother, could have fallen upon this phrase. Few phrases are more commonly on the lips of a mother when commanding or entreating a child than "Your father is displeased" or "Your father wishes this done," etc.

We may here endeavour to account for the comparative scantiness of the references to our Blessed Lady in *Mark* and *Matthew*, made all the more manifestly scanty by the very full references in *Luke*. This phenomenon is usually, and we believe quite rightly, accounted for by the death of our Blessed Lady, which may have taken place before the publication in Rome of St Luke's gospel.

We have already seen how the gospel of St Mark, which is an authentic record of the teaching of St Peter, has no explicit mention of the Virgin Birth, or indeed of the unique dignity of the Virgin Mother. We have said that one main reason, perhaps the one main reason, of this silence is St Peter's desire to teach only what he witnessed. Yet another reason may here be mentioned. To stress the Virgin Birth, and especially to stress it in public sermons in Rome itself, could hardly be prudent during the lifetime of our Lady. Rome's intelligence department, which was so accurate and minute in its information as to know the genealogy of a poor Galilean carpenter, might be expected to use its methods of inquiry on the alleged Virgin Mother of the outcast Founder of the Christians.

But Rome could not be kept for ever in ignorance of the Virgin Mother. Indeed there was a certain fitness in the fact that when this

woman was beyond the sphere of imperial action the first official declaration of her dignity should be promulgated by St Luke in Rome itself, and should thereby have the authentication of St Paul and of St Peter.

(*d*) St Luke's account of the Birth and Infancy of Jesus, for which we must be indebted in great part to the Mother of Jesus, is in no way calculated to revise, but rather to supplement, the account given by St Matthew. His first two chapters bear everywhere the print of being an official statement made by an αὐτόπτης (eye-witness) in order to complete and set in order the great happenings and doings of the beginnings.

A certain quality which we can call only humility runs through these chapters. Thrice does this Virgin Mother of Jesus speak of the "parents" of Jesus—once she publicly in the Temple calls St Joseph His father. Although a simple statement made to supplement what had been recorded in St Matthew's gospel would necessarily bring out her unique dignity, yet her self-witness is never self-assertiveness. She thus took after her Son, who left His sacred dignity of Godhead to be gradually discovered beneath His almost bashful self-witness.

The Annunciation

This quality of humility is nowhere seen in greater perfection than in the opening vision to the priest Zachary, husband of our Blessed Lady's cousin (συγγενής). If we had only St Matthew's account of the beginnings of the Incarnation, we should conclude that Jehovah's first message of the approach of Messianic redemption was to the little home from whom the Messias was to spring. But it seems fitting to the handmaiden humility of the Mother of the Messias to record how the first message came to a member of Israel's sacred order of the priesthood, in Israel's most sacred building, the Temple, and in the most sacred hour of official prayer before the very Holy of Holies.

Yet even the self-witness of humility could not hide the dignity of her who called herself "handmaid" when God was calling her to be the human mother of His divine Son. Nothing in the Old Testament was more sacred than was Zachary—an official priest offering sacrifice in the Temple's Holy place. Yet the dignity of this priest of the Old Testament yields to the dignity of a maiden in her cottage in a hamlet in the Galilean hills.

The contrasts between the angel Gabriel's appearance to the priest in the Temple and to the highland maiden in her home may be best seen in a scheme:—

ZACHARY	MARY
Lk. i, 8 . . . when he (Zachary) executed the priestly function.	*Lk.* i, 26. . . . the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth,
9. . . . to offer incense, going into the temple of the Lord,	27. to a virgin espoused (*παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην*) . . . and the virgin's name was Mary.
11. . . . there appeared to him an angel. . .	28. And the angel being come in said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. . .
12. And Zachary seeing him was troubled, and fear fell upon him.	29. Who having heard, was troubled at his saying and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be.
13. But the angel said to him: Fear not, Zachary, for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife (*γυνή*) Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. . .	30. And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.
	31. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus.
	32. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the most High . . . (35. . . . the Son of God.)
15. . . . he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb. . .	(35. . . . the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee. . .)
18. And Zachary said to the angel: Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.	34. And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man?

19. And the angel answering said to him: I am Gabriel, who stand before God; and am sent to speak to thee. . .

20. And behold, thou shalt be dumb, . . because thou hast not believed my words.

35. And the angel answering said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee. . . .

38. And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

(i) The term *virgin* (παρθένος) is most significantly used by St Luke. St Matthew always calls our Blessed Lady the *wife* (γυνή). *Mt.* i, 20, 24, . . "fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife". . . "and Joseph . . . took unto him his wife."

But St. Luke contrasts Mary the Virgin (παρθένος) with Elizabeth the wife (γυνή) of Zachary. This is all the more significant because Eliabeth, like our Blessed Lady, was childless.

(ii) The parallelism in these opening passages of St Luke's gospel is as complete and as Hebrew as in the opening passages of *Matthew*.

(iii) But with this difference. In *Matthew* the parallelism is only between the three dream-visions to the one person, St Joseph. In *Luke* the parallelism is between a vision given to a priest in the Temple, in the Holy Place, at the solemn hour of sacrifice, and a vision granted to a poor betrothed maiden in a little highland hamlet. The parallelism everywhere confirms the dignity of the Maiden!

(iv) There is a marked contrast between *Lk.* i, 11, "there appeared to him an angel," and *Lk.* i, 26, ". . . the Angel Gabriel was sent from God . . . to a virgin espoused." Not since the time of Eve had such an embassy been sent to a woman. No parallel with this angel-embassy to Mary can be found in the history of the Jewish people.

(v) Although both messages—to Zachary and to Mary—regard the birth of a child, one embassy is to the husband, the other to the espoused virgin.

(vi) *Lk.* i, 28. "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." This is the salutation of an ambassador to one of royal rank. An Angel salutes his Queen.

There is no salutation of the priest in the Temple.

(vii) *Lk.* i, 12. "And Zachary, seeing him, was troubled", because the priest of God was not accustomed to see angels..

Lk. i, 29. "[Mary] having heard was troubled. . ."

> "Others say that as the Blessed Virgin was accustomed to angelic visions she was not troubled at seeing this angel, but with wonder at hearing what the angel said to her, for she did not think so highly of herself. Wherefore the evangelist does not say that she was

troubled at seeing the angel but at his saying." (St. Thomas, *Sum. Theol.*, III, *q.* 30, *a.* 3, *ad* 3.)

The vision to the Blessed Virgin, as recorded by St Luke, is also contrasted with the vision to St Joseph recorded by St Matthew. St Thomas notes accurately: "The imagination is indeed a higher power than the exterior senses; but because the senses are the principle of human knowledge the greatest certainty is in them, for the principles of knowledge must needs always be most certain. Consequently Joseph, to whom the angel appeared in sleep, did not have so excellent a vision as the Blessed Virgin" (*Ibid. ad* 2.).

(viii) *Lk.* i, 29. " . . . and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be." This is in marked contrast with Zachary's fear. The Virgin, accustomed to visions, but disturbed, as the humble of heart are disturbed, by hearing herself praised, is not disturbed in her powers of reasoning. The evangelist represents her as reasoning not about the substance of the vision but about its mode and outcome. Students of mystical phenomena will recognise how much higher is this vision than that granted to Zachary.

(ix) *Lk.* i, 13 "Fear not, Zachary, for thy prayer is heard."

Lk. i, 30 "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God."

How subtle is the contrast! Something that Zachary asked is promised. Something that Mary in her humility could not think to ask is given. An answered prayer is contrasted with an outpoured grace.

Lk. i, 13 ". . . thy wife shall bear thee a son." Wife, husband, child.

Lk. i, 31 "Thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a child." No husband, but only wife and child.

(x) *Lk.* i, 31 "Thou shalt call his name Jesus." Not only the child is given, but the child's name. Indeed, whereas the Son of Zachary and Elizabeth has but one name, the Son of Mary has three names!

Moreover, this Virgin Mother is of such supreme dignity, that it is she, the woman, and not Joseph, the man, who gives the name.

Note the three names in series of dignity: JESUS; THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH; THE SON OF GOD (*Lk.* i, 31, 32, 35).

(xi) *Lk.* i, 15 " . . . He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost."

Lk. i, 35 "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy

which shall be born of thee shall be called the SON OF GOD."

The Holy Ghost will come down not on Zachary or Elizabeth but on their son.—The Holy Ghost will come down, with the power of the most High, on Mary, so that the Son of Mary shall be called the SON OF GOD.

(xii) *Lk.* i, 18 " . . . How shall I know this?"

Lk. i, 34 "How shall this be done?"

Zachary is so little accustomed to angels that he is not sure of the message because he is not sure of the messenger. To reassure him, St Gabriel has to say "I am Gabriel."

It is otherwise with our Lady. She is so accustomed to angels that she is in no need of being told the name of her angel-messenger. Her doubt is not a lack of faith, as was Zachary's doubt. It is a mere lack of information through revelation, the one possible source of information.

(xiii) *Lk.* i, 20 "Behold thou shalt be dumb because thou hast not believed my words."

Lk. i, 38 "And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done [FIAT] to me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her."

Here again the contrast between the priest and the Maiden is most striking. The key to this contrast has been expressed by St Thomas: "It was reasonable that it should be announced

to the Blessed Virgin that she was to conceive Christ . . . in order to show that there is a certain spiritual wedlock between the Son of God and human nature. Wherefore in the Annunciation the Virgin's consent was besought in lieu of that of the whole of human nature" (*ibid.*, *a.* 1.) The Virgin had therefore an official function; and this official function is no less than to represent the whole human race in the wedding with the Son of God.

This wedlock over, the angel withdraws from the presence of his Queen.

The Visitation

In order to weigh accurately St Luke's witness to the dignity of the Blessed Virgin in his account of the Visitation, we must bear in mind the Hebrew character of St Luke's gospel. Lagrange says that St Luke's gospel contains more Hebrew forms than do *Matthew* and *Mark* indeed many more than *Mark*.* Biblical critics who see these facts do not always see the significance of the facts. In the present matter it is most significant that there is a much less decided

*"Luc est incontestablement celui des trois synoptiques qui contient le plus de tournures hebraïsantes. Il en a surtout plus que Marc. Et cependant il faut renoncer à un évangile hebreu qui serait la source de nos synoptiques" (Lagrange, *Saint Luc*, Gabalda, 1921, p. xcvii.)

Hebrew character in St Mark's (i.e., St Peter's) gospel, published in Rome, than in St Luke's (i.e., St Paul's) gospel, also published later on in Rome. The contrast between the Petrine gospel and the Pauline gospel is almost paradoxical. In his *Epistle to the Galatians* St Paul had written "to me was committed the gospel of the uncircumcision as to Peter was that of the circumcision" (*Gal.* ii, 7). Yet the gospels which were due to their teaching are so different from what might seem the plain meaning of these words to the Galatians, that we might take St Paul to be the Apostle of the Jews and St Peter the Doctor of the Gentiles.

To the present writer this seems a fact of first magnitude for understanding the meaning of St Paul's, and indeed of St Peter's, epistles, as well as St Luke's *Gospel and Acts*. In the hastily written letter to the Galatians St Paul had so identified himself with the Gentiles and had so accentuated the imperfections of the Jewish dispensation that he had spoken of the CURSE OF THE LAW (*κατάρας τοῦ νόμου, Gal.* iii, 13).*

A cursory examination of St Paul's subse-

*The word *curse* (*κατάρα*) is used only five times; but its use is most significant. Twice it is used in *Galatians* of the LAW (*Gal.* iii, 10, 13); once again in *Hebrews* vi, 8, "That which bringeth forth thorns and briars is reprobate and very near unto a curse."—this is a plain explanation of the phrase in *Galatians*; once in *II Pet.* ii, 14, "Having their heart exercised unto covetousness, children of malediction" (*κατάρας*).

quent epistles will make it clear that he was at pains later on to explain this phrase, one of the "things hard to be understood" which are to be found, as St Peter so meekly says, in St Paul's epistles. Gradually his explanation became fuller and fuller until it reached in prison the fulness of the immortal letter to the Hebrews. Midway between the epistle to the Gentile Galatians and the *Hebrews* stands St Luke's work in the *Gospel* and the *Acts*.

The *Gospel* of St Luke is Hebrew not only in phrase but in aim. It is in many ways the glorification of the Jews, and especially of the Jewish priesthood. Its Jewish and priestly character is paralleled only by the *Epistle to the Hebrews;* for which, indeed, it seems to prepare the way.

(i) It alone shows that the first message about the Incarnation was to a priest—in Jerusalem—in the Temple—at the hour of sacrifice. The Temple is here a House of Prayer and not a Den of Thieves.

(ii) *Luke* suggests that even our Blessed Lady, the only human parent of the Son of God, was of the priestly tribe, being a kinswoman of Elizabeth who "was of the daughters of Aaron"*

*The only mention of Aaron in the New Testament is by St Luke (*Luke*. i, 15; *Acts* vii, 40) and *Hebrews* (v, 4; vii, 11; ix, 4). These identifications in minor points are not minor confirmations.

(iii) *Luke* alone tells us that St John the Baptist was of the priestly tribe.

(iv) Had St Luke not written his gospel the Church of to-day would not know that it was in the Temple that our Blessed Lord received his first public recognition. Moreover, this presentation was in fulfilment of that law which St Paul had spoken of as the Curse of the Law: "they carried him to Jerusalem . . . as it is written in THE LAW OF THE LORD" (*Lk.* ii, 22, 23.)

(v) *Luke* tells us that even the legal rite of circumcision, so great a matter of discussion by the Pauline group, was faithfully observed by our Blessed Saviour.

(vi) It tells us, moreover, that year by year the Holy Family left their home in Galilee to go up to Jerusalem for the Passover (*Lk.* ii, 41).

This is an astounding narrative from the pen of the Greek physician; and still more from the Gentile follower of the Doctor of the Gentiles.

But whatever else is doubtful in the gospel of St Luke, it is certain that this gospel, published in Rome by the faithful secretary of St Paul, is unsaying the phrase *Curse of the Law* by everywhere glorifying the Jewish people and especially the Jewish law with its sacrifice and sacrificing priesthood.

All this serves to bring out the dignity of the Virgin Mother whom St Luke describes as

visiting the home (in Jerusalem?) of the priest to whom had been sent the first official news of the Incarnation (*Lk.* i).

15. . . . he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb.	41. . . . when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.
	42. BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN, AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB.
15. He shall be great before the LORD.	43. And whence is this to **me** that the MOTHER OF MY LORD should come to me?
14. And thou shalt have joy and gladness.	44. For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.
20. . . . thou shalt be dumb and shalt not be able to speak . . . because thou hast not believed my words, which shall be fulfilled in their time.	45. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because these things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.

(i) As Zachary, the priest, is still dumb, speech must be left to Elizabeth. Later on, when the punishment of dumbness has been finished, Zachary will be seen to have seconded in thought what Elizabeth had said in welcoming "the Mother of her Lord".

(ii) The special outpouring of the Holy Ghost, foretold by the angel at his visit to Zachary,

awaits the visit of our Blessed Lady. But this fulness is greater than the words of the angel would have led us to expect. Not only the child but the mother is filled with the Holy Ghost.

(iii) "Blessed art thou among women," etc. To feel the force of this inspired cry of Elizabeth we must remember that of all the daughters of Sion none had received such a gift as Elizabeth had received by the miraculous begetting of St John the Baptist. Yet this does not conceal from her the greater gift to her young kinswoman, Mary. Not only was the child begotten in Mary greater than her child (BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB), but the mode of begetting was greater (BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN). Now the only mode of begetting greater than that of Elizabeth's son John was that of Mary's Son Jesus. Only virgin begetting could be greater than miraculous begetting.

(iv) "THE MOTHER OF MY LORD." This is a clear enunciation of the fact that the Son of Mary was the Messias, whom her son was to "go before in the spirit and power of Elias".

(v) *Lk.* i, 14 "Thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice in his nativity."

Lk. i, 44 "For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy."

Again it is through the coming of Mary (bearing her Son) that the prophecy of joy is fulfilled. Mary is graciously called, in her Litany, "Cause of Our Joy"; even though another of her titles is "Mother of Sorrows".

(vi) The unbelief of the priest, Zachary (*Lk.* i, 20), is contrasted with the belief of the Virgin Mother. Indeed Zachary's unbelief is punished by his own dumbness; whilst Mary's belief is rewarded by the inspiration and sanctification of Elizabeth and her unborn child.

(vii) Two phrases are contrasted, "the words that shall be fulfilled in their time" (*τοῖς λόγοις μου οἵτινες πληρωθήσονται εἰς τὸν καιρὸν αὐτῶν*) and "those things shall be accomplished which were spoken to thee by the Lord." *ἔσται τελείωσις τοῖς λελαλημένοις αὐτῇ παρὰ Κυρίου.*) Literally "there shall be a consummation of the things spoken to her by the Lord." The word "consummation" (*τελείωσις*) is only twice used in the New Testament: here and in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, vii, 11; "If then perfection [*τελείωσις*] was by the Levitical priesthood . . . what further need was there that another priest should arise according to the order of Melchisedech, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?" Strangely enough it is a daughter of Aaron who speaks to the Mother of the Priest of the order of Melchisedech, and foretells that through her

faith the perfection or consummation would come.

* * * *

Lk. i, 67, 68 "And Zachary his father was filled with the Holy Ghost. And he *prophesied* saying: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because he hath visited and wrought the redemption of his people." Here follows the Canticle *Benedictus*.

(i) The word *prophesied* is remarkable. In the gospels there is only one other mention of any individual prophesying. St John says: "And this he spoke not of himself; but, being the high priest of that year, he *prophesied* that Jesus should die for the nation" (*Jn.* xi, 51). It is significant that there are, thus, in the gospels but two mentions of actual prophesying: the priest Zachary, and the high priest Caiaphas.

(ii) This prophetical witness of Zachary's Canticle to Mary's dignity may be summed up in the words of Lagrange:

> "If Mary was present and if her presence has inspired Zachary, as Origen thinks (*Hom.* 10), Luke may have been alluding to the situation and to the birth of St John. But Luke has hinted that Mary was no longer present. . . The canticle is, then, the reply of Zachary to the question raised about John,

and this reply *comprises all that the presence of Mary had revealed to the two spouses*. The Canticle consists of seven distichs. Everyone recognizes a pause after v. 76. The first four distichs take up the theme of the *Magnificat*, while leaving out what is proper to Mary" (*op. cit.*, p. 58).

What greater witness could there be to the dignity of this Virgin Mother of Christ, than that a priest in the solemn words of inspired prophecy should be re-echoing her inspired words?

The Birth at Bethlehem

The Bethlehem which the Church, especially the Church Innocent, worships at Christmas is essentially the gift of St Luke—or, shall we say, of the Mother of Jesus. If instead of the gospel of St Luke we had only the gospel of St Matthew —and there is no third gospel of Bethlehem—our knowledge of the Birth of Jesus could never have created the traditional Christmas. St Matthew's scanty account of the Birth might have been the occasion of strange misunderstanding. We should never have known that our Lady and St Joseph quitted Nazareth their home to be present at an official census. We might easily have concluded from *Matthew* that

the home of St Joseph was not at Nazareth, but at Bethlehem.

Again, who would have suspected the stable (*φάτνη*) of *Luke*, when *Matthew* mentions only a house (*οἰκία*)?

Moreover, who would have thought of the outcast poverty when reading how the House of the new-born Messias was visited by three foreign princes who brought presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh?

Yet if, on the one hand, St. Luke supplies those details of poverty and sacrifice—the long journey from Nazareth, the search for shelter, the stable—which St Matthew had omitted, on the other hand it is St Luke who stresses the recognized dignity of the Child, His miraculous Birth, and by this recognition further emphasises the dignity of the Mother.

(i) *Lk.* ii, 7 "And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." This is the detailed account, and from St Luke's pen it is a professional account, of the miraculous child-birth, by an expert in child-birth, i.e., a doctor. Moreover having told us that our Lady dwelt in Nazareth it is he and not St Matthew from whom we learn that the expectant mother had made a long journey with all the hardships of the poor in their wayfaring.

This young mother, after a long journey, "brought forth her first-born—swathed him—laid him in a manger." St Luke states everything as having been done by the Mother: all the verbs are active. The tradition which sees here a miraculous mode of child-birth seems an obvious commentary on the physician's accurate account.

Significantly enough, though the physician Luke writes "brought forth and swathed," he does not say "cleansed." He who came to cleanse the sins of the world, needed no cleansing. "You were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled" (*I Pet.* i, 18,19). No other blood than His own was shed to redeem the world. Hence even the blood of child-birth was set aside:

Sicut sidus radium
Profert virgo filium
Pari forma.
Neque sidus radio
Neque virgo filio
Fit corrupta.

Luke. ii, 18, 19 "And all who heard wondered at those things that were told them by the shepherds. *But* Mary kept all these words, pondering

them in her heart." To this significant statement of St Luke we may add a second: "And his mother kept all these words in her heart" (*Lk.* ii, 51). Some valid reason must be found for St Luke's insistence that the Mother of Jesus kept, as mothers seldom fail to keep, in the storehouse of her heart the memory of her child's doings and sayings. A sufficient reason may be the quite simple if not obvious one, that St Luke, who records the fact, had freely drawn from that storehouse of the eye-witness the story of those beginnings which he alone has passed on to the great storehouse of the Church. But to claim that the Mother of Jesus is the witness, as in so much she alone can be the witness, is to give her an official share in the great dogmatic tradition of the Church. Indeed if we count all that the Church's teachers have cast into the Church's treasury of teaching "Verily, I say to you, this poor widow hath cast in more than they all" (*Lk.* xxi, 3).*

*St Luke's accuracy of statement is most delicate. Thus, in speaking of the child Jesus he uses three words: *βρέφος, babe; παιδίον,* a diminutive of *παῖς,* hence a *little boy;* and *παῖς,* a *boy.*

In speaking of Bethlehem, he calls Jesus *βρέφος*: *Lk.* ii, 12, 16, "You shall find the infant (*βρέφος*) wrapped in swaddling clothes" "They found Mary and Joseph and the infant (*βρέφος*)." In vv, 17, 27, 40, it is *παιδίον.* But in describing the finding in the Temple, the child of twelve years is no longer *βρέφος* or *παιδίον* but *παῖς*: JESUS, THE BOY.

The Presentation

Lk. ii, 34, 35 "And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother: Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thine own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed."

(i) This action and saying recorded by St Luke make us realise how much he has added to the record of St Matthew. Of course the divine maternity implicitly taught by St Mark is explicitly taught by St Matthew. But the Virgin Mother in St Matthew's gospel is not assigned any further function than to conceive and bring forth the child Jesus. St Luke, in recording the inspired action and prediction of Simeon, has made it clear that the Virgin Mother had some further function, linked with the unique redemptive function of her Child; that this function would be through suffering; and that it would bring her into relation even with the souls (hearts) of others.

(ii) This function is so clearly unique that it is made a matter of prophecy, in the Temple. In St Matthew's gospel St Joseph, not our Blessed Lady, is the sole recipient of divine communications. But in *Luke* St Joseph's monopoly of

vision and prophecy passes to our Lady, who receives, not mere commands for to-day, but great mystic promises of unnamed suffering in an unknown to-morrow.

The Finding of the Temple

Lk. ii, 48, 49, 51 "And seeing him they wondered. And his mother said to him: Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business? . . . And he went down with them . . . and was subject to them. And his mother kept all these words in her heart."

(i) Again this scene is in strong contrast with the *θεοτόκος* of St Matthew. St Joseph, though present, is silent. It is the Mother alone who has speech with her Son.

(ii) The authority of this Mother over this Son is such as to beget in the minds of mere literary critics a doubt about the divinity of the Son. This child of twelve years represents Himself as concerned primarily with the will of His Father in heaven. For this will of the Father He leaves His mother and foster-father with such secrecy that they suffer all the pang of having lost Him for three days.

Moreover, when His mother meekly suggests the authority of His home He rightly pleads the Father's will. All this is manifestly consistent with the doctrine that Jesus Christ had no earthly father, but only an earthly mother and the divine Father. But what seems inconsistent with this doctrine of the self-conscious divinity of Jesus Christ, with its recognition of the supreme authority of the divine Father in heaven, is His instant recognition and acceptance of the authority of the human mother on earth.

No scene in the gospels of St Matthew and St Mark equals this scene of St Luke's in expressing the dignity of the Virgin Mother of Jesus; it is so striking that one might be borne to look on it, with its loss and sorrow, as the fulfilment of Simeon's prophecy of the soul which the sword should pierce. Indeed Simeon's prophecy "that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed" has perhaps found its echo and fulfilment in St Luke's phrase: "And his mother kept all these things in her heart."

No doubt Simeon's dark prophecy did meet a fulfilment in the sorrow of loss and the joy of finding. Yet there was a further fulfilment, making still clearer and authoritative the prophecy of Simeon. But it is to be found in the last of the gospels, which we deal with under

the head of St John's witness to the Blessed Mother of Jesus.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

St Luke has one final reference to our Blessed Lady in the opening of *Acts*, i, 12-14; "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount that is called Olivet... And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room where abode Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James of Alpheus, Simon Zelotes and Jude the brother of James. All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women *and Mary, the mother of Jesus.*"

This final scene in which St Luke takes leave of our Lady shows her in a position of primacy amongst those first Christians gathered together in the Upper Room. St Luke, the evangelist of women, had filled his pages with the names and doings of Elizabeth and Mary Magdalen and Martha and Joanna and Susanna and Mary of James. Yet all these names disappear from the pages of the *Acts* in which St Luke records the doings of the infant Church. Only one name is mentioned; but it is the name of her who watched over the Infant Jesus.

This picture of the first Christian church gathered together under the visible motherhood of our Blessed Lady is so much in the spirit of St Luke's gospel and so far beyond the mere letter of *Matthew* that it introduces us to the unique position recorded of our Blessed Lady by the beloved disciple, St John.

CHAPTER IV

THE WITNESS OF ST JOHN

St John's witness to our Blessed Lady is to be found in his Apocalypse and in his Gospel.

THE APOCALYPSE

"And a great sign appeared in heaven: A Woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And being with child she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered. . . And she brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all the nations with an iron rod. And her son was taken up to God and to His throne" (*Apoc.* xii, 1, 2, 5).

St John's mystical prophecies are a blending of figure with reality. In this passage, where the Son of Thunder is describing the death-struggle between Jesus in His Church and Satan in the persecuting Roman Empire, the woman is not only in figure the Church, but is in reality the Mother of Jesus.

It is significant that, in the passage immediately preceding this reference to the Mother of Jesus, St John referred to St Peter and St Paul. "And I will give unto my two witnesses and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and sixty days. These are the two olive-branches and the two candlesticks that stand before the Lord of the earth. . . They have power to shut heaven . . . And when they shall have finished their testimony the beast . . . shall kill them" (*Apoc.* xi, 3-7.)

In following up the names of these two olive branches with that of the Mother of Jesus, St John was giving to the early Church a lesson on the supreme dignity of our Lady.

Nor is it without precedent in the gospels that the Mother of Jesus should take the place of the Church and thus officially represent the Church as distinct from the official Head of the Church, her Son Jesus Christ. Already we have seen how in St Luke's account of the Annunciation the heavenly ambassador Gabriel, charged with arranging the proposed wedlock of the WORD with mankind, delivers God's message to "a Virgin" from whom as from the mouthpiece of mankind he awaits consent. St John's apocalyptic identification of the Woman with the Church is but another setting of this theme of the Annunciation.

Moreover, it is true to say that, if we set aside the unique right of Jesus Christ to represent the Church, no other individual can claim to represent the Church as it is officially represented by its first official representative, the Virgin of the Annunciation. Not even St Peter is such a representative as our Blessed Lady. St Peter has had successors who equalled him in his official powers. But there has not been and there cannot be a successor of the Virgin Mother of Jesus.

THE GOSPEL

St John's unique witness to the dignity of our Blessed Lady is given in two scenes recorded in his Gospel—the marriage-feast at Cana, and the Crucifixion.

Mary at Cana

Jn. ii, 1-8, 11 "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. And the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the marriage. And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus saith to him: They have no wine. And Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is that to me and to thee? (*τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι*) My hour is not yet come. His mother

saith to the waiters: Whatsoever he shall say to you, do you. Now there were set there six water-pots of stone. . . Jesus saith to them: Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them to the brim. And Jesus saith to them: Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it. . . This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him."

(*a*) It is often said that the Son of Thunder introduces the eternal Word into his gospel like a lightning-flash falling from heaven to the earth: "In the beginning was the Word."

There is no stable, no child-birth, no swaddling clothes. The Light from Light suddenly dawns. The eternal Word suddenly re-echoes; the Ancient of Days suddenly takes His place in the measured days of time as a Babe but a moment old.

St John has contrived to invest with some of the same dramatic quality the entrance of our Blessed Lady into the story of her Son. There has been no mention of a child-bearing or a child-birth for this Word made flesh. Yet suddenly the Son of Thunder speaks of the Mother of Jesus; as if obviously the Word could be the eternal Son of only the eternal divine Father, and the Son in time of only a

human Mother: "The Mother of Jesus was there."

(*b*) To appreciate the witness of St John to this Mother of the Word made flesh we must be able to appreciate the aim and the circumstances of St John's gospel. St John's aim is not disputable, in face of his own plain declaration. His gospel was "written that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name."* (*Jn.* xx, 31). It is then a commonplace that the gospel of St John is much more explicit than are the gospels of St Matthew, St Mark, and St Luke, about the divinity of Jesus Christ, because in point of fact the Church's consciousness of the divinity of Jesus was gradually becoming more and more definite. Yet, contrary to what we might therefore expect, St John's gospel is most insistent on the dignity and indeed the power over her divine Son of the human mother of Jesus Christ.

(*c*) This marriage-scene at Cana is indeed a strange fragment in an early gospel written by the Virgin Apostle.

(i) It is the ennoblement of Marriage by the

*This may be compared with the Roman Form of Baptism. "X—What dost thou ask of the Church of God?—Faith.—What doth faith lead thee to?—Life everlasting.—If then thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments."

Apostle who began the tradition of ecclesiastical celibacy.

(ii) It is the condemnation of those who condemned the use of wine.*

(iii) And lastly it is the glorification of the Mother at whose word marriage is ennobled by the stupendous miracle of changing water into wine. This dignity accorded to the Mother of God by the Evangelist who seemed most concerned to prove the Godhead of her Son could hardly fail to impress the early Church, as if by a peal of thunder or a flash of lightning.

(*d*) St. John, with great delicacy, never mentions the name Mary; although it is mentioned once by St Mark, five times by St Matthew, and twelve times by St Luke. From the gospel of St John, the beloved disciple and Christ-appointed guardian of the Mother of Jesus, only two names are withheld—the name of John and the name of Mary. But it does not need any deep thought to realise that one who stood in the place of a son could not speak of the one

*Considering the exaggerated asceticism of the apostolic times, there was a danger that the Church might take up a Manichæan attitude towards the drinking of wine. Texts from the New Testament might even have favoured this misguided view. Thus St Peter speaks of "excess of wine" (*I Pet.* iv, 3). In his *Epistle to the Romans* (xiv, 21) St Paul says "It is good . . . not to drink wine."—And the angel Gabriel said of the Baptist "He shall drink no wine" (*Lk.* i, 15). St John's account of the marriage-feast at Cana finally and fully laid to rest these misunderstandings of his contemporaries.

who stood in the place of his mother, by her name Mary.

It has long been felt that the evidently deliberate omission of the name John from the fourth gospel was a strong auxiliary proof that it was the gospel of John. The confirmatory proof is multiplied to us when we realise that, alone among the four gospellers, the writer of this gospel has omitted, as only John would be likely to omit, the name of Mary. To this Christ-appointed Son of Mary she is ever Mother; yet ever Mother not of John but of Jesus.

(*e*) But the full force of this son's witness to his appointed mother is to be found in the last statement, which is unique amongst the statements about our Blessed Lord's life and miracles: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him."

Few sentences in any of the gospels contain so many of the characteristic and important words of the gospel.

(i) The *beginning* (ἀρχή) is used by St John more frequently and more dogmatically than by any other of the evangelists.

(ii) *Miracles* (σημείων, *signs*) is St John's most chosen word for our Blessed Lord's supernatural action with persons or things.

(iii) *Manifested* (ἐφανέρωσεν). Neither St Mat-

thew nor St Luke have this word. St Mark uses it twice of the Risen Saviour's appearance to the two disciples (*Mk.* xvi, 12) and to the eleven (*ibid.*, 14). St John uses it eight times (i, 31; ii, 11; iii, 21; vii, 4; ix, 3; xvii, 6; xxi, 1, 14) and always of our Blessed Lord.

(iv) *Glory* (δόξαν) is another characteristic word of St John used frequently in his *Gospel* and *Apocalypse*.

(v) *Believed* (ἐπίστευσαν). Although St John is rightly looked upon as the evangelist of love, yet he is also especially the evangelist of faith. The verb *believe* is used by St Mark nine times; by St Matthew five times; by St Luke five times; by St John thirty-seven times!

None of the evangelists is so intent on the necessity of faith and of the miracles (signs) which Jesus wrought in order that men might believe. This need of believing threads his gospel from beginning to end. *Jn.* i, 7 "This man came for a witness, to give witness to the Light, that all men might believe through him." *Jn.* xx, 30, 31 "Many other signs [σημεῖα] also did Jesus which are not written in this book. But these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name."

(*f*) It is clearly the intention of St John to

represent this incident as the beginning of the official public ministry of our Blessed Lord. But if, according to St John, the official public ministry of the world's Redeemer began at Cana, the rôle of the Mother of Jesus is seen to be also official. It must be borne in mind that *officially* Jesus was still under the authority, not of St Joseph His foster-father, who was dead, but of Mary His mother. The action of His mother at Cana, recorded by St John, is seen to supplement her action, some eighteen years earlier at Jerusalem, as recorded by St Luke. In each case Jesus seems to be reluctant to follow the will of His mother. In each case His mother is so conscious of her authority and of His obedience that she does not insist on her will. In each case her trust in His obedience is justified, but in different ways. In the first incident, when the boy of twelve seems to wish to begin His public life, the indirectly expressed authority of His mother brings Him back to eighteen years of hidden home life. But in the second incident, when the man of thirty years seems to wish to continue this hidden home life, the indirectly expressed authority of His mother makes Him begin His public life.* Here, as so often elsewhere, the

*The historic discussion on the meaning of the phrase *τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι*, is of great volume and interest. But whatever view may be taken of the meaning, the phrase leaves intact the dignity and authority of our Blessed Lady.

gospels provide that strong proof from undesigned coincidences; and, indeed, that stronger proof from undesigned completions. The marriage feast completes the finding in the Temple. The same authority that can recall the Redeemer to eighteen redemptive years of hidden life can send Him forth on three years of redemptive public life. Galilee having finished its work, the Redeemer had to go to Jerusalem and to death. No wonder that St John adds "After this he went down to Capharnaum, he and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they remained there not many days. And the pasch of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" (*Jn.* ii, 12, 13).

(*g*) But it is not only the Finding in the Temple that St John supplements by the marriage feast at Cana. There is another incident recorded in various ways by the Synoptists: the coming of His mother and His brethren and the praise of those "who do the will of God" (*Mt.* xii, 46-49; *Mk.* iii, 31-34; *Lk.* viii, 19-21). The incident has been such a puzzle to exegetes that the Dumb Ox of Sicily felt called upon to say of his venerated model and master, who held that our Lady had acted from vain-glory, "in

Indeed if the meaning is that our Blessed Lady's wish is not her Son's, as later on in the garden of agony his Father' will was not his will, his subsequent acceptance of her will shows that he yielded to her authority as to his Father's.

these words Chrysostom goes too far" (St Thomas, *Sum. Theol.*, III, *q.* 27, *a.* 4, *ad.* 3). While holding with our master St Thomas that the incident does not mean any reprimand of the mother by the Son, we may remark that St John, who so clearly shows his knowledge of the Synoptists, displays here as often elsewhere his determination to remove misunderstandings on fundamental doctrine. His method is, as usual, thorough-going. He entirely suppresses the Synoptic incident of this appearance of Mary in the public life of Jesus. But he records another unambiguous incident in which Mary is responsible for beginning the public life of Jesus.

Mary on Calvary

Jn. xix, 25-27 "Now there stood (εἱστήκεισαν) by the Cross of Jesus his mother and the sister of his mother, and Mary Magdalen. When, therefore, Jesus had seen his mother, and the disciple standing (παρεστῶτα) whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that, he saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own."

(*a*) With this scene the New Testament witness to the Mother of Jesus comes fitly to a close. It will be admitted that the dramatic

power of this climax could hardly be surpassed. Although St Luke's account (*Acts* i, 12) of the Mother's presence in the Upper Room is the last incident recorded in the life of the Mother, this story of Calvary is told to the Church by St John perhaps thirty years after St Luke. It was not a new Church but a new generation that heard, because, perhaps, it needed to hear, this authoritative account of the "mother of Jesus," the Mother of the Saviour of the World, in the solemn hour of the world's redeeming.

(*b*) In thus giving us two scenes, or rather two great acts, in the drama of the Mother of the Word, St John has recalled the dramatic fitness of the two places where the acts were performed: Cana (Galilee) and Jerusalem (Judæa). St John is so loyal a Galilæan, as opposed to Judæan (Ἰουδαῖος), that his records of the Galilæan ministry are lyrical. But for him Jerusalem is from the beginning a clot of blood on his pages. Full of this contrast between Galilee that gave Jesus safe shelter for thirty years and Jerusalem that slew Him in less than thirty months, St. John points out that it was at Cana in Galilee that the Mother gave mankind her Son, and that it was in Jerusalem that the Son, in the hour of His rejection by mankind, gave mankind His Mother!

(*c*) A main concern of St John's gospel is to show the sacrificial and therefore voluntary

character of the death of the Word made Flesh. Though the Son of Man had to die that men might be redeemed, the Son of God could suffer no constraint of death except that caused by His own love-impelled will. St John's account of the Crucifixion is but an insistence on two facts, the first, that the death of Jesus is voluntary because it is sacrificial, the second, that it is sacrificial and voluntary not merely because He is the Son of Man but also because He is the Son of God.

Hence St John omits the cry recorded by St Mark and St Matthew, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", and even the cry recorded by St Luke, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (πνεῦμα). According to St. John the last words are of a sacrificial character: "It is finished." And death is described (*Jn.* xix, 30) as an act of conscious free-will: "bowing his [as yet unbowed] head he gave up his spirit" (πνεῦμα), which no man and no act of man could take from Him against His will.*

(*d*) It is therefore significant that St John, having omitted the Redeemer's two cries to God His Father, should have given such prominence to the Redeemer's mother. This episode

*It is to St John we owe the knowledge of three facts: that the "side" of Jesus was pierced by a lance; that from the pierced side flowed blood and water; but that Jesus was dead before the lance-wound.

of the Mother cannot be, in St John's mind, a mere interruption of the sacrificial act of redeeming mankind; on the contrary, it expresses some real mode or gift of our Saviour's copious redemption.

(*e*) We can here apply a principle of interpretation recorded by St John: "These things I have told you that, when the hour shall come, you may remember that I told you" (*Jn.* xvi, 4); and again: "These things I have spoken to you abiding with you. But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you" (*Jn.* xiv, 25, 26).

If, at the beginning St John may have looked on his Master's commission to him as a personal relationship to the Mother, time and the Holy Spirit would teach him to see at last more than he had seen at the beginning. On the Mount of Redemption only one apostle was found near his dying Master. The great body of disciples was officially represented by one who is called THE DISCIPLE (ὁ μαθητής). To no other but St John could be given any final message or commission to the official Church.

But the holocaust of the world's redemption meant that the world's Redeemer had to give up all—even His mother: "If any man come to

me and hate not his father and *mother* . . . and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (*Lk.* xiv, 26).

Whatever, then, the disciple may have thought of the commission granted to him by the words "Woman, behold thy son.—Behold thy mother", he would gradually see that, in the supreme moment of redemption, only supreme commissions and gifts could be given; nor could these be given personally to John, son of Zebedee, but only to the disciple who stood on the hill officially as a representative of mankind. In other words, St John saw, and taught the early Church to see, that in the supreme hour of redemption Jesus, in giving mankind the right to call His mother by the name of Mother, had given mankind something that He alone could give. Who else but the king could give his subjects the right to say "Mother" to the mother of the king?

On that Mount of Redemption there is nothing wrought by the Redeemer that is not redemption. If there is a giving, it is a redemptive giving; if there is a forgiving, it is a redemptive forgiving. St Luke records how to the repentant thief Jesus forgave his sin and gave the kingdom of heaven. St John records how to the disciple Jesus gave His beloved mother. These two givings on the Mount of Redemption

are part of the Saviour's copious redemption.

(*f*) This—shall we not call it, this sacrificial —giving of the mother of Jesus to be mankind's Mother presents strange affinities with another giving, of a visible Shepherd to the visible flock (*Jn.* xxi, 15-17). Both scenes are recorded by St John alone; and recorded for the instruction of that new generation of Christians which was, on the whole, out of touch not only with Jesus but with the eye-witnesses of Jesus. On the official position of Mary and Simon Peter no witness could be more authoritative than St John, to whom Jesus had given charge of His mother, and in whose hearing Jesus had given to Simon the charge of His Church.

If it was at Ephesus that St John wrote his book (*βιβλίον*), Diana of the Ephesians, the mighty huntress, had now to yield place to the meek Maid of Nazareth—the uncowed Mother of the Crucified. Nor was such a change of sovereignty a pain to the good. Paganism had been too confessedly an acceptance, rather than a redemption, of the world's sin for any pagan goddess to be looked upon as a fit mother of mankind. But when the world's Redeemer came —a sinless fruit from a sinless stem—part of His sacrificial redemption was to make mankind again a family and the world a home, by giving it a mother who was all holy, but all human, and a

Father who was All-Holy because He was all divine.

(*g*) We have ventured to suggest that, when St John recorded our Blessed Lady's public action at Cana, he consciously or unconsciously explained, by supplementing, what St Matthew, St Mark and St Luke recorded of another public action of our Blessed Lady. We may again suggest that St John's record of what took place on the hill-top explains St Luke's record (in the first chapter of *Acts*) of what took place in the Upper Room. Calvary with all its travail-pains had given to this mother of Jesus a new motherhood, and to mankind, especially to the Church, a new childhood, which would rightly bring her a new place of honour in all the counsels of the Church. Thus it is the apostle who was charged to be her son to whom we owe the meaning of this Woman whose name alone is linked with the Pillars of the Church. And that meaning is expressed in one of the familiar child-like rhymes of the ages of faith:

MATER DEI
EST MATER MEI.

* * * *

No one who tries to tell some great thing or happening he has seen can come to the end of his telling without a humiliating sense of failure.

The present writer can hardly hope that, in defiance of this law, his readers will rise from this little book on our Lady with a feeling of gratitude, when an overwhelming sense of failure is the writer's own mood on bidding his book Godspeed.

Yet he has only tried to read the witness of the four evangelists as if certain great truths were true! He has, therefore written as if God the Father was God and Father; as if God the Son's being made Man—the Incarnation—was an historic event, indeed an historic institution; as if God the Holy Ghost by His divine inspiration provided the philosophy, and indeed the theology, of history. Moreover, with these principles in his mind, the writer has ventured to read the witness of the four evangelists not just as four gospels but as one. He has thus applied to the varying text of the different gospels the principle that St Augustine applied with such reassurance to the varying text of the two Testaments: *et apparuit mihi una facies eloquiorum castorum, et exultare cum tremore didici.** He has found, what he hopes his readers will also find, that the witness of the four evangelists to the Mother of Jesus is a witness in such manifest series that each subsequent writer not only

*"And the face of those pure words seemed one to me; and I learned to rejoice with trembling" (*Confessions*, Bk 7.)

confirms but supplements what had been written before. In this way the four gospels make the Gospel proof not fourfold but manifold, by multiplying rather than adding to it.

St Mark's gospel, with only implicit reference to the Virgin Birth of Jesus, is St Peter's witness, before the metropolis of the Roman world, that Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was the Son of only a heavenly Father, but of a human mother.

St Matthew's witness, with its chain of dream-visions given to Joseph the foster-father, makes explicit what St Mark—perhaps of wisdom prepense—will keep implicit. For St Matthew the Virgin Birth is not just a hidden truth running through and holding together "the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God"; still more is it a visible and fundamental pattern in the gospel. This mystery of the Virgin Birth and the consequent dignity of the Virgin Mother are so great that they are prepared for and guaranteed by revelation. To make the mystery all the more indisputably guaranteed, it is to the husband, the legal head of the woman, and not to the woman herself, that the guarantee is divinely given. In setting down these facts, St Matthew has made known details of the Mother's dignity which we could not have presumed from the meagre implicitness of St. Mark.

In St Luke's gospel Mary of Nazareth, wife of Joseph, is not merely, as in *Matthew*, a θεοτόκος, a God-bearer whose official function is narrowed to the bringing forth of the Son of Man, and whose official subjection to her husband demands that the God-sent tidings of her dignity should be sent not to her but to her husband. Such a limited view of our Lady's office might well have obtained if Christian thought had found its only matter for meditation in the gospel of St Matthew. But in the gospel of St Luke Christian thought was provided with further supplementary matter for meditation. The Virgin Mother of St Matthew's gospel might have been taken—or mistaken—for a θεοτόκος with no further function than to bear and cradle her divine Child; but the Virgin Mother of St Luke's gospel—our Lady of the Annunciation, of the Visitation, of the Presentation, of the Finding—has motherly functions of up-bringing and authority reaching far beyond the cradle-age of her Son. St Luke extends the sphere of our Lady's dignity both forward and backward—forward beyond the first days at Bethlehem to the twelfth year at Jerusalem and indeed to the unknown years at Nazareth; backward beyond the dreams of Joseph to the day when "the Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a City of Galilee". Thus the first chapters of St Luke's gospel

tell the early Christian Church of a Woman whose official dignity before God is such that, though a lowly Galilæan maid, she receives higher honour than a priest of God in the Temple of the Holy City at the holiest hour of sacrifice!

No wonder that this Lady of the opening chapters of St Luke's *Gospel* is to be found again in the opening chapter of his *Acts*, where she takes her place by right among the priests and apostles of the Church of God—not indeed as a priest or apostle but as the Mother of the PRIEST and the APOSTLE.

It is needless to say that the same principle, used by St Luke to supplement St Matthew and St Mark, is used by St John to complete the very full witness of St Luke. On reading what St Luke had written about the Mother of Jesus, Christians might well have asked what more need have been written to give the Mother a unique place in the love and devotion of the Church. It is consoling to realise that what seemed impossible or superfluous to write has been written by the evangelist to whom the charge of the Mother was given by divine commission. This lightning-souled lover of Jesus, this champion of His Godhead, has, in the last book of the New Testament, recorded his eye-witness and ear-witness of two facts that

complete what his predecessors had implied or written to the honour of his "mother." It is St John alone, an eye-witness of the marvels of Cana, who records a scene implying that this mother had divine authority to send her Son from His private life in her home to His public ministry in the world. Again it is St John alone who records that this obedient Son, in the most solemn hour of His sacrificial world-redeeming death, bequeathed to the world His mother; thereby giving mankind the privilege of being children of Mary, and laying on His mother the duty of being the Mother of Mankind.

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SUMAT PER TE PRECES,
QUI PRO NOBIS NATUS
TULIT ESSE TUUS.

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